HOUSE BETWEEN FOREST & FIELD | NEW YORK | NARCHITECTS

Tree Hugger

A discreet second home emerges from the woods, with respect for the land around it.

BY LINDA C. LENTZ
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MORAN

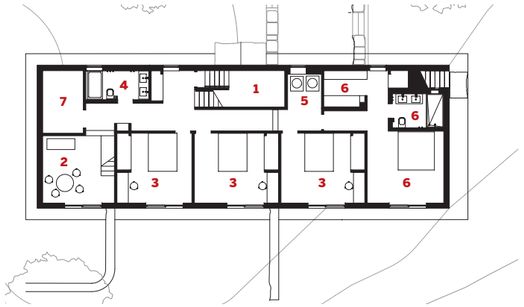
ON A BRISK and sunny February afternoon, the cedar-clad house designed by the Brooklyn-based nARCHITECTS was barely visible from the road. Tucked into the trees at the northwestern corner of a grassy, wheat-hued clearing in New York's rural Dutchess County, its wood-slat rainscreen facade was, on that day, a near perfect color match with the wintry landscape. Its slender lines, barnlike massing, and deeply pitched gable roof, too, create such a discreet profile it can be easy to miss from certain angles. Yet those who make their way up the inconspicuous approach that snakes to the front door will discover a surprisingly transparent country house, playfully punctuated by broad windows that open to expansive vistas.

This is the first house completed by the 2004 Design Vanguard studio known for its explorations of various typologies through public and commercial works in and around New York, such as the Jones Beach Energy & Nature Center (RECORD, March 2022). To preserve and take advantage of the house's idyllic setting "between forest and field," as they refer to it, the architects pushed and angled the 27-foot-deep by 70-foot-wide building into the trees as much as they could. "But we also wanted it to peek out for daylight and views, mainly the latter, which are amazing," says Eric Bunge, firm cofounder with his wife and partner, Mimi Hoang. Hoang adds that, fortunately, the land is zoned Rural Residential, so the fields (and views) have to be maintained.

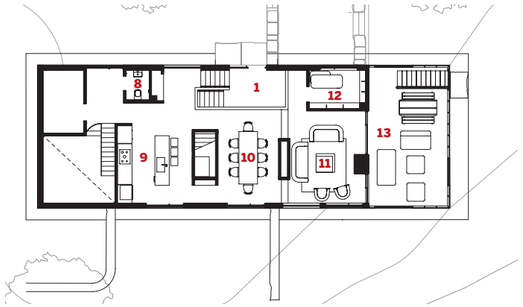
Located on 13 acres, 100 miles north of Manhattan, the 3,600-square-foot residence is modest in scale and materiality, both to minimize its impact on the site, and to satisfy a mandate for a functional, family-oriented second home issued by the clients—a couple with three older children, who, like the architects, are also from Brooklyn and acquainted with them through their respective sons, friends at school who, coincidentally, facilitated this commission.

The compact wood-frame structure navigates the hilly topography on a stepped concrete slab that follows the natural grade as closely as possible. A small basement on the north accommodates a mechanical room for a geothermal heat-exchange system, which works in conjunction with four new wells. And, while a few trees had to be cut during construction, they are being replanted—with more to come, say the homeowners.

According to Bunge, inspiration for the main concept also came from his young son, who suggested they build a tree house for his friend. "Of course, he was thinking of a house in a tree," says Bunge. "But we thought, what if you experience the house the way you experi-



FIRST-FLOOR PLAN



SECOND-FLOOR PLAN

SOUTH-FACING SECTION AT THE ENTRANCE

0 15 FT.
5 M.

1 FOYER
2 FAMILY ROOM
3 BEDROOM
4 BATHROOM
5 LAUNDRY
6 PRIMARY SUITE
7 MECHANICAL
8 POWDER ROOM
9 KITCHEN
10 DINING AREA
11 LIVING AREA
12 LIBRARY
13 PORCH
14 LOFT/STUDY

SPACED battens on the porch (this image and below) and generous fenestration (opposite) lend a porous quality to the building.

ence a forest?" With this as a reference, the architects developed a scheme around the idea of structural cores as metaphorical tree trunks that both support the skylit galvalume roof and frame the building's programmatic volumes within a relatively open floor plan. These eight cores also do double duty as key functional zones that contain, for instance, kitchen appliances, stairs, storage, mechanical equipment, and a chimney. In addition, the robust raw-steel knee walls of a central third-floor loft study overlooking the living area (like a tree house) serve as structural beams. Such material efficiency enables the attenuated roofline, high ceilings, and connected communal spaces the clients were after. Beautifully detailed Luan-plywood-clad core walls and heated oak floors are the dominant surfaces of the main living space, which flows freely throughout the second floor, from kitchen to living room, leading to what everyone agrees is the most popular "room" in the house: an enclosed porch, with stairs that connect to the surrounding grounds.

Key to the success of this arrangement is the placement of the bedrooms on the first floor.

"We presented the clients with two ideas," says Bunge. "One was living in the sky; the other was sleeping in the sky." "Luckily," he adds, "They chose the former." The resulting ground floor contains a small family room and four bedrooms on the building's south side, each opening to the landscape with glazed sliding doors that provide direct access to the outdoors. A warmed concrete floor here is "softened" with random leaf impressions, made with actual hand-ironed foliage.

To unify the whole design, the architects turned to the region's vernacular barn typology, reinterpreting it by enveloping the building with slatted western red cedar, even the porch, giving this outdoor room an especially intimate and protected quality. Subtle spacing variations between slats on alternating sections enliven the facade. However, it's the bold fenestration that really commands attention. Placed to maximize daylight and breezes, the wide windows and sliding glass doors lend a permeability to the house that results in as many views through it as out of it.

At the time of RECORD's visit, three additional small structures by nARCHITECTS were in construction—a wedge-shaped garage, a combined music studio/guest house, and a lap pool—closely encircling the house. And while it is currently a family getaway, it was clear from our conversation that it would become a more permanent residence in the future. "We're excited to be here and by the work that they did," the homeowner said. "This is our home, and we're really pleased about it." ■

Credits

ARCHITECT: nARCHITECTS — Eric Bunge, partner in charge: Mimi Hoang, partner; Isabel Sarasa, project architect; Laura Lee, Paul Mok, Jason Kim, Adina Bauman, Michelle Lin, Emilie O'Neill, design team

ENGINEERS: Silman (structural); T.M. DePuy Engineering & Land Surveying (site/civil); OLA (m/e/p)

CONSULTANTS: Lumen Architecture (lighting design); Ellana (cost estimation)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: UCE Fine Builders

SIZE: 3,600 square feet

COMPLETION DATE: July 2022

Sources

MOISTURE BARRIER: Benjamin Obdyke

WINDOWS & DOORS: Sierra Pacific

CURVED KNEE WALL: Pepin Steel & Iron Works

LIGHTING: Luminii; Muuto; Flos

FURNISHINGS: Muuto; HAY; Humanscale; Blu Dot; Bensen; DanishDesignStore

SOLID SURFACE: Stone Source

PHOTOGRAPHY: ©FRANK OUDEMAN

STRUCTURE doubles as a steel knee wall and wood stair (opposite, top) and fireplace (this image). Bedrooms open to the land (opposite, bottom).